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The courtly love romance is frequently discussed in terms of the characters' masochistic tendencies. These discussions respond to the inordinate amount of suffering that occurs in courtly love texts with the idea that there is pleasure in pain. This is one of the most attractive ways to explain all this suffering, but many courtly love texts also problematize the idea of the masochistic contract and masochism in general. And masochism, of course, is certainly not the only explanation for the predominately male suffering in courtly love texts, but there are several reasons why it may be the most convincing.

As Jeffrey Cohen explains in his version of the masochistic contract from "Masoch /Lancelotism," the vassal who sees the rigidity of the power structure in the court can either rebel openly and become an outcast, or devise a way to create another power structure (within the one into which he has been forced) that will empower him (237). Here the masochistic contract is useful for understanding the suffering of courtly love. The vassal develops a contract with his lord's lady, or at least a woman of a higher class than himself, to gain power in a structure that does not allow him to rise in class and gain power. The contract is masochistic because he chooses a woman who can never love him without obstacles, the obstacles created by the same hierarchy he is trying to escape while simultaneously working within it. When interpreting "courtly adultery," as defined by Christiane Marchello-Nizia, Peggy McCracken argues that an adulterous relationship between a queen and a vassal or between any noble lady and a man who is a subject to that lady's lord is "a displaced form of attraction to, rivalry with, and submission to the king's power" (86). This is because a king's or a lord's wife is representative of his power, the power that a vassal will never have in the strict hierarchy of the court. The vassal desires the lady because he both wants to be close to the lord and wants the power that the lord has. By gaining the lady's favor, the vassal rises in the court, getting closer to the lord and gaining, in a sense, the lord's power. Furthermore, his affair threatens to make his son, if one is born, the presumptive heir of the lord's title.

But the lord's wife is attractive for other reasons as well. She is the epitome of the unattainable other for the vassal. She is forbidden him not only because she is married, but also because an affair with her is treasonous since it again displaces power from the lord to the vassal. If the lord discovers the affair, he is forced either to make the punishment and the information about his loss of power public or to banish the vassal from the court and punish his lady privately. Either way, the vassal has lost all the power his affair afforded him and more. This risk and the forbiddenness of the lady make her all the more attractive. This is the ultimate example of the masochistic contract in courtly love texts because it seems to involve all the essential components in their most heightened state; the trapped man rises in power by loving an unattainable woman whose favor threatens his life and whose unavailability tortures him with or without her consent.

The complexity of a courtly love text like Chaucer's *Troylus and Criseyde* initially poses many problems to the masochistic contract. But at the same time it is clear that something is needed to explain the suffering of Troylus and the "disloyalty" of Criseyde, a character that Chaucer painstakingly imbues with a respectable voice for the first time in her literary history. In other versions of the story there is little room to sympathize with Criseyde's position. In such texts it is clear that regardless of whether or not Troylus enjoys his suffering, Criseyde is the cause of his pain. It seems then that Chaucer is trying to reveal an irony in the tropes of courtly love. By giving Criseyde a voice, he has created a space both to sympathize with her and to question the extent to which Troylus' suffering is her fault. The effect of Chaucer's decision is a more satisfying, but equally complicated, understanding of the masochistic contract in courtly love literature. It reveals that the masochistic contract is not just a vehicle to capture the power of the lord, but that the contract itself is powerful.

But the power inherent in the masochistic love contract is somewhat hidden in courtly love texts. For instance, when explaining Lancelot's behavior through the masochistic contract, Cohen never focuses on why Lancelot's suffering is pleasant to him. Masochism, defined as taking pleasure in pain, is assumed and no explanation is given why, for instance, being wounded and humiliated for love of Guenevere is particularly pleasing to him. But there is an explanation for this. As Victor Taylor states, "The contracts place the masochist in a position that has more to do with pleasure in power than pleasure in pain" (65). This source of power lies in the creation and manipulation of the sadist. The masochist, by falling in love with an unattainable woman, forces the woman into the sadist's role, regardless of whether or not she is sadistic by nature. She ends up being the source of his pain, or at least acting as his source of pain, because he insists that he loves her when he knows they cannot be together for whatever reason. The masochistic contract that the lover creates is an orderly prescription for a chaotic scene that takes control out of the masochist's hands, at least in appearance. But the masochist will ultimately be in control because he knows that he is controlling the hand that tortures him. He both uses his power to choose to be a victim and then creates the terms of his victimization, manipulating

his torturer into doing his will, that is, to torture him. It is clear then that there is an ironic reversal in the roles of master and slave when put in the frame of the masochistic contract. The masochist is the victim inside the terms of the contract, but he is truly the master outside of the fantasy. This condition evokes at least two interesting points. Most obviously, if the master and slave roles of the contract are reversed in reality, then the supposed sadist is the true victim. In addition, the question arises as to whether it is possible for the masochist to lose sight of the reality of the power structure completely and therefore become oblivious to his power, believing that he is truly the victim and destroying the ability for either person to escape from the fantasy once it is created.

These two problems are at the heart of *Troylus and Criseyde*, as well as most courtly love texts. The masochism of the man in love is clearly detailed, but any suggestion that he might control this suffering or even create it himself is negated by the frequent claim that love "overtakes" a person. Troylus' love is described in just this way. The god of love is insulted by Troylus' contempt for love and therefore strikes him with love so suddenly that "with a lok his hert wax afere" with love for her (I . 229). Such descriptions of love as an uncontrollable and sudden affliction are also in texts such as *The Romance of the Rose*, and they are common in the poetry of the troubadours. The effect is that all the power to reject or accept the lover is presumably placed in the hands of the beloved. In this cultural context it is not only easy but almost inevitable to forget the power of the masochist. *Troylus and Criseyde* reveals the power and powerlessness in all the characters by putting them in the framework of a courtly love narrative and using it to critique the culture.

It is the war, not Criseyde, which makes Troylus powerless. He creates a contract to gain power through controlling Criseyde as his torturer. He knows he will evoke no sympathy for his true anxiety, being forced to fight and die, so he receives sympathy from Pandarus by creating pain out of love. This is an acceptable pain, given the tropes created by the troubadours and others. Troylus gives into Criseyde's pleas that the relationship remain unofficial because it keeps her unattainable and allows him to play the victim by giving her the power to have her way. The masochistic contract keeps him from having to admit that he is powerless in a much more crucial area of life. He has no power to escape war and prolong his life. He cannot escape fighting nor can he escape the risk of death. Just as the vassal is trapped by the system of the court, Troylus is trapped by the system of war. He must fight simply because he is a man, but the added pressure comes from his talent for fighting, which, in a sense, would make him a traitor if he attempted to escape fighting. The Trojans are losing and he is their best warrior; therefore he must fight. In this manner, Chaucer uses Troylus and the poetry of courtly love to expose the powerlessness of men in wartime.

Jacques Lacan, when describing courtly love as anamorphosis, explains that courtly love literature "tends to locate in the place of the Thing certain discontents of the culture" (150). That is, courtly love texts point to discontents in culture by in some

way representing these discontents as the "thing" that the character desires. Chaucer's account of Troylus locates in the place of the Lacanian Thing (Das Ding) the discontent that men feel in wartime as tools of the state, forced to fight and die because culture will chastise them if they refuse. Discontented with this lack of power in his life, Troylus starts to desire Criseyde, who he then rules over in just the way that the war culture rules over him. He takes away her power to choose her level of involvement by making her his Thing, that which he desires but cannot have.

But if the text sheds light on Troylus' lack of power in war it also reveals his power over Criseyde and her virtual powerlessness. She lacks even the power to become a masochist. Chaucer's addition of Criseyde's voice in the narrative shows the reader that she is truly the lark caught in the claw of the sparrow hawk (III .1911-2). Her consent to love Troylus is her attempt to escape the contract that he has already forced upon her. She can be the sadist who torturers him by withholding her love, or she can become his lover and force him to stop treating her as his sadist. Her only choice is to love him, or at least try to. Her only power is the power to love, because choosing not to love is not an option. She expresses her wish to remain single when she is trying to "decide" what to do about Troylus' love for her, but realizes that she does not have the power to choose a single life. Even if she did have enough protection from Hector not to need a husband, Pandarus is making her situation increasingly powerless, thrusting Troylus' letter down her dress, pushing her to write an ambiguous letter back to him, tricking her into coming to dinner where Troylus was hiding, and finally putting Troylus in her bed when he has fainted. By that point her "decision" to accept Troylus is completely an illusion as she is a woman fighting the will of two men with whom she is alone in a bedchamber. At this point, Chaucer depicts her consent to be with Troylus as something she is bound to do but has come to terms with. The consent is described in this way:

> This Troylus yn armes gan here streyne,
> And seyde, "O swete, as evere mot I gon,
> Now be ye kaught, now is there but we twcyne –
> Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is noon."
> To that Criseyde answered thus anoon:
> "Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte dere,
> Ben yolden, ywys, I were now not here!" (III . 1206-11)

In this passage as he crushes her in his arms he blatantly describes her situation as one she cannot escape and must yield to. Her consent reads as wholehearted, but given that she is truly not able to say no it almost appears over-acted, like a person convincing herself of the truth of her words by trying too hard to convince her audience of their truth.

Earlier she has been forced to be Troylus' torturer even before she learns of his love for her because he is already busy lamenting his love before he even talks to her. So in

this sense, she has already become part of a contract to which she never consented. After she realizes that her only power lies in giving up her body to Troylus, she consents but uses the excuse of preserving her reputation to keep herself from having to commit to marriage. This limited consent agrees with Troylus' masochistic contract because it keeps her somewhat unattainable and preserves the excitement of the relationship by keeping it secret and forbidden.

When Lady Fortune intervenes to take Criseyde to the Greek camp, both Troylus and Criseyde use the excuse of preserving her reputation, but for different reasons. Troylus sees it as a reason to heighten her unattainability and keep his contract alive, in an intriguing state of flux. Therefore, even before he talks to Criseyde about the new situation, he rushes to his bed, his favorite place to weep and sigh over his pain, and tells Pandarus that he "sholde have / Here honour levere than my lyf to save" (IV . 565-6).

Criseyde, on the other hand, uses her reputation as an excuse because it is her only escape from giving Troylus a real commitment. If he speaks out on her behalf it will be known that he loves her and she will be expected to marry him, losing more of her freedom. Her reputation could only be helped by Troylus' love. Certainly, if the son of the king were in love with a widow who is an outcast because of her father's traitorous tendencies, his love for her could only be a boost to her reputation. It is uncertain how much time has passed since her husband has died, but even if she should still be mourning, Troylus need only tell his father that he loves her, not that they are lovers, in order to keep her from leaving. If she were presumed to be unaware of his love for her, no slur could be placed on her reputation and they could wait the allotted time until marriage. This is certainly a more positive and controllable outcome than believing that she will be able to escape and return in ten days' time. But Criseyde avoids true commitment at all costs. She risks being sent to the Greek camp and later knowingly gives up her reputation, which she is earlier so bent on preserving, to become Diomede's mistress. In becoming only his mistress, at least within the time frame of the narrative, she again avoids marrying. Diomede, however, seems to prefer her as his wife, considering his inquiry about why her father has not married her off yet.

Once again, Chaucer's courtly love poem has exposed another's discontent with medieval culture by interjecting its mores into the culture of ancient Troy. Criseyde wants freedom. She wishes to be her "owene woman" (II . 750). Yet she cannot survive in culture without the protection of a man. She expresses that she is glad to be rid of the "jalousye" and "debat" of married life (II . 753), but she also sees the falseness in the beloved woman's right to choose to love or not to love her vassal. In courtly love the woman is inevitably the sadist of the masochistic contract, unwilling or not. Simply her suitor's decision to choose her as his beloved and torturer makes her choice an illusion. For the medieval woman who is willing to be loved this absence of choice is less of a problem, but she still cannot make a contract just as the man does. She can risk both her physical safety and the loss of her freedom to love by

trying to retain her single status in the medieval world, or she can become a nun of sorts and remove herself completely from the realm of sexual love. A medieval woman's masochistic contract is inherently more complex and unstable than the man's because the woman creating the contract has less power in the first place. By being an unwilling lover, Criseyde neither accepts the role of sadist in Troylus' contract, nor does she create her own contract. She never revels in her suffering as Troylus does. Instead, she preserves her freedom in love by giving her love or affection, but not her heart, as Chaucer interjects, to these two men who make her the object of their affection and put her under their power. This response is Criseyde's reaction to her discontent with her culture, and although Chaucer tries desperately to improve Criseyde's reputation from that of previous accounts, he never is able to clearly reveal the position of the medieval woman in courtly love. Chaucer is unable to clearly say that Criseyde may love both men but that her love is not the love that strikes the men, but a love that develops over time and under forced circumstances.

Instead, Chaucer is eager to deny that she could have loved both of these men within the short time period that the narrative suggests. The clearest example of Chaucer's attempt to preserve the sympathy he has created for Criseyde from the beginning comes at her most fickle moment, when she gives herself over to Diomede. Chaucer's plan seems to be to refuse to show any pleasure Criseyde might have in either hurting Troylus or loving Diomede. He refuses her pleasure in these two areas because it would have given the medieval reader a chance to label her as a sadist or a whore and to forget what she has gone through. He also undermines this part of the poem by repeatedly attributing the turn of events not to truth or even to his own authorship but to "the story," meaning the apparently unreliable sources he is using to retell the narrative. His narrator is dissatisfied with the fact that his sources seem to undermine his plan to rescue Criseyde's name, so he denies authorship and undercuts his sources. It is "the story," for instance, that says Criseyde gives Diomede the broche and "the story" that tells us she wept when she saw the wounds Diomede was given by Troylus. To deny her pleasure in her love for Diomede, Chaucer' narrator specifically asserts that "Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym here herte" (V . 1050). But after Chaucer has undermined the validity of his sources, he then decides to bring the "truth" back into his text when he describes the sorrow she felt over her betrayal of Troylus:

> But, trewely, the story telleth us,
> Ther made nevere womman more wo
> Than she, whan that she falsede Troylus. (V . 1051-3)

"Trewely" is referenced in the Middle English Dictionary (MED) to the word "treuli" which can mean anything from truly to sincerely to obediently. But other definitions include the phrase "in fact" or "an account that is factually accurate." All these at least point to Chaucer's sudden attempt to legitimize the sources he has so

recently undermined as hearsay. Since he focuses on the sorrow she feels rather than on her pleasure and he denies altogether the possibility that she might actually love Diomede, he gives her more chance to be read as a character to which one should be sympathetic. But he is still not comfortable allowing her to love freely and escape the overbearing power that the men's love for her has over her freedom. If she does love these men, it is a forced love and therefore should not be held to the same standards of a love that overcomes its "victim" as courtly love claims to. By choosing to be victimized by love, Troylus takes on a certain power, but without the power to make such a decision Criseyde can only grow to love as she comes to know her lover over time. It seems obvious that Troylus' loyalty to his love is easy to keep because it suits his desire for power through chosen victimization. But Criseyde has no motivation to be faithful to Troylus other than the love she has developed for him. His loyalty supports his original motives for starting the relationship, while her loyalty is only hurtful longing to be near the man she has come to love.

Pandarus too has his discontent with culture, although it may be more hidden than Criseyde's. Pandarus seems to be constantly subverting Troylus' masochism by destroying the fantasy of Troylus' powerlessness in love. Pandarus is constantly pushing and encouraging Troylus to help him achieve what he wants. Overall, Pandarus is more concerned with Troylus' happiness than with that of himself or of his niece. He cries for Troylus' pain, declares his hatred for his niece when she hurts Troylus, and even admits his slight jealousy when Troylus cries for the loss of Criseyde.

> But tel me this, whi thou art now so mad
> To sorwen thus? Why listow in this wyse,
> Syn thi desir all holly hastow had,
> So that by right it oughte ynow suffise?
> But I, that never felte in my servyse
> A frendly chere, or lokying of an eye,
> Lat me thus wepe an[d] wayle til I dye. (IV . 393-9)

It seems from these lines that Pandarus is saying more than simply "it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." He points to his own unfulfilled desire for a friendly greeting or glance from his beloved at the same time that he talks of his "servyse." This kind of "servise," according to the MED, can mean labor performed for another, a life in the service of God, a requested favor, service in a lord's court, a payment of rent, and even slavery. The most logical meaning in this context would refer to the effort Pandarus has gone through for Troylus' happiness. But Pandarus clearly expects the gazes and greetings that he longs for to be a result of his service, implying that Pandarus is looking for these greetings and glances to come from Troylus. In a sense, Pandarus has made his own masochistic contract. He is the vassal and Troylus is his unattainable lady. And indeed he is more unattainable than even a queen, in a culture that will never recognize homosexual love as it does the

heterosexual courtly love that it places on such a high and elaborate pedestal. In this case, Troylus has so much more power than Pandarus would have as a gay man that the question of Pandarus forcing Troylus, as Troylus forces Criseyde, is moot. Pandarus, though he clearly manipulates the other characters, ultimately has no real power because no matter whom he manipulates his desire for love will never be fulfilled by Troylus.

Essentially, by understanding the ironic power structure of the masochistic contract, the motives for its frequent use in explaining the suffering in courtly love texts become much clearer. The masochistic contract in courtly love is initially a one-sided power play on the part of its creator, but this is not to say that a masochistic contract cannot become mutual. In the case of those couples simultaneously struck by love or those in which both partners love the other equally, the masochistic contract can work in the way that Slavoj Zizek explains in "From Courtly Love to The Crying Game." Zizek argues that a couple that is on relatively equal ground in terms of real power can use the contract to constantly switch roles within the relationship (108). Master and slave become reversible within the couple's world and this alternation can preserve a relationship that might otherwise become stale and therefore unstable in a way that a constantly changing relationship does not.

But, unfortunately, circumstances offering equality were rare in medieval literature, so that masochistic contracts were rife with dangerous pitfalls for all parties concerned. Nowhere is this danger more apparent than in *Troylus and Criseyde.*

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